How Partisanship is Strengthened in Election Times:
A Longitudinal Analysis using the German Socio-Economic Panel, 1984-2012

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Abstract

Party identification is not only a central variable helping scholars to understand voting behavior, party attachments are also of high functional value for the citizens themselves. Identifying oneself with a particular political party helps citizens to process the large amounts of political information they are exposed to and it helps them choosing what party to vote for on Election Day. High politically sophisticated citizens, however, are more likely to identify with a party than low politically sophisticated citizens. Building on a functional theory of partisanship, we argue that citizens are more likely to identify with a party when the need to do so is highest, i.e. when Election Day is close. Our results do indeed show that citizens are more likely to report a party identification and have stronger party attachments in election times. Additionally, in election times when they need partisanship most the low sophisticates succeed in compensating for part of their disadvantage in partisanship.

1 Introduction

Ever since The American Voter (Campbell et al., 1960) was published, party identification has been considered a central concept in political behavior research. Studies have convincingly shown that party identification is one of the major determinants of the vote choice (Campbell et al., 1960; Dalton et al., 2011). Additionally, scholars have found partisanship to serve as a cognitive shortcut for a multitude of political decisions that citizens have to take (Popkin, 1991; Shively, 1979; Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). As a consequence of this latter role, partisans are found to have more coherent political values, policy attitudes and candidate evaluations than non-partisans (Lavine and Gschwend, 2006).

Over the last decades, scholars have noted a general decline of partisan attachments in Western democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002; Dalton, 1984, 2007). Regardless of this observed decline, party ties remain an important guiding tool for political decisions (Clarke et al., 2009; Lau et al., 2008; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008) and for processing political information (Bartels, 2002). Additionally, feelings of closeness to parties still serve as a linkage mechanism between citizens and political parties, ensuring stability of democratic regimes (Hooghe and Kern, 2013).

Partisanship clearly plays a central role in the process of making a vote choice and in politics in general. Therefore, it can be considered worrisome that previous research has indicated party identification not to be equally distributed among the electorate. A number of scholars have pointed out the existence of a gap between politically low and high sophisticated voters. Low politically sophisticated voters possess partisan attachments less often than the high politically sophisticated (Albright, 2009; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Marthaler, 2008). There has been ample research investigating individual-level heterogeneity in partisanship, remarkably few scholars have however focused on how contextual factors affect partisanship. More specifically, given that it is by now an established fact that partisan ties are more dynamic than originally thought (Fiorina, 2002), the question rises how partisanship evolves over time.

According to the functional model of partisanship, partisan attachments are important cognitive heuristics guiding citizens through the complex political world (Dalton, 2012; Shively, 1979). In the context of elections when citizens have to process large amounts of information to arrive at a vote choice partisanship is especially relevant. We hence hypothesize the probability that a citizen identifies with a party to be higher in election times.

Elections furthermore can have a strong impact on the relation between political sophistication and partisanship. Current findings indicate that knowledge differences are partly dependent on contextual variations and it has been shown that information-rich environments even eliminate knowledge gaps (Fraile, 2013; Iyengar et al., 2010; Jerit et al., 2006; Kuklinski et al., 2001; Wolak, 2008). Knowledge gains can consequently be thought to allow for partisanship to develop among the low sophisticated group of the electorate. Accordingly, we hypothesize that the partisan gap between the low and the high politically sophisticated is narrowed in elections times.

Investigating the dynamics of partisanship requires the use of panel data. Furthermore, to be able to compare election times to non-election times it is essential that the data cover multiple election periods. The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) meets these requirements, as the data allow tracing party identification patterns in Germany over 29 years (1984-2012) including 7 federal elections. While we expect the hypothesized impact of elections on partisanship to be present in any Western democracy, we focus on the German case only in the current paper. The German electoral context is a good case to investigate the causes of partisanship, as scholars have found party identification to be a valid construct in Germany (Arzheimer, 2006; Falter et al., 2000; Falter, 1977). This paper is structured as follows. We first give an overview of the literature on partisanship and on its functional value more specifically, which allow us to formulate our hypotheses. Next we present the data, the German Socio-Economic Panel. We subsequently present the results of our analyses and we end the paper with some conclusions and suggestions for further research.

2 The Functional Value of Partisanship

Investigating what determined the vote choices of the American electorate in the 1950s, the authors of The American Voter suggested that partisanship was of crucial importance. They described party identification, which has since become a central concept in electoral behavior research, as a voters psychological association with a political party (Campbell et al., 1960). Traditionally it is assumed that party identification is different from and more general than voting behavior (Kohler, 2002). Even if people now and then vote for other parties than the one they identify with, party identification is still thought to be a stable and powerful driving force for voting behavior (Arzheimer and Schoen, 2005; Johnston, 2006; Neundorf et al., 2011).

Party identification was thought to be acquired mostly through socialization processes during adolescence. As a consequence, scholars assumed partisanship to remain fairly stable over voters lifetime (Campbell et al., 1960; Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Lazarsfeld et al., 1965). Political socialization at the dinner table (Kelley, 1992) is by far the most important factor providing young citizens with a start-package for the entry to the political world.

Ever since these ground-breaking studies were published, partisan ties appear to have weakened (Arzheimer, 2006; Dalton, 2007, 2013). Additionally, the presumed stability of acquired partisanship has been questioned by research indicating that voters update their party identification with retrospective evaluations of party performances (Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1981). Evidence underscores the view that party identification is by no means as stable as one would assume following the classical argumentation. Recent findings indicate that a substantial number of voters indeed have volatile party attachments (Neundorf et al., 2011; Schmitt-Beck et al., 2006).

While most of the debate is focused on the question whether instability in partisanship is a result of measurement error (Arzheimer and Schoen, 2005; Green and Palmquist, 1994), less attention is given to the question which context factors possibly come into play. In this paper, we focus on over-time variation in whether or not a citizen identifies with a political party. As

the need for having a partisanship evolves over time, whether or not and how strongly citizens identify with a party as well should vary. We basically argue that the partisanship to which a citizen is predisposed to can be activated in election times.

The theoretical foundations for this expectation are to be found in functional theories of partisanship. Most importantly, Shively (1979) has urged scholars to move research on party identification to investigating the reasons why citizen develop party attachments. Doing so, he proposed a functional model. In essence, his model comes down to the fact that citizens can be expected to acquire partisanship when "they need a way to handle difficult electoral decisions" (Shively, 1979, p.1039). The functional logic implies that information does not lead to partisanship, but that large amounts of information necessitate the activation of partisanship. Partisanship is functional because attachments "provide structure to the ordinary persons understanding of the external world" (Miller and Shanks, 1996, p.121).

A number of reasons can be given why the need for an attachment to a party would be highest in election times. First, when Election Day is closeby, citizens clearly realize that they have to make a political decision, namely a vote choice. As a consequence, the stronger this feeling of having to make a decision what party to vote for, the higher will be the need for partisanship to guide that decision (Shively, 1979). Second, in election times, citizens are exposed to more political information and campaign material than is the case outside of election time. Partisanship is thought be of high value here, because it can serve as a cognitive shortcut to help citizens processing large amounts of information (Dalton, 2007; Shively, 1979). Building on the functional theory of partisanship, we argue that identifying with a political party is of higher functional value in election times compared to a non-election period. This expectation ties in with research showing that party identification is indeed activated during election campaigns (Grant et al., 2009). For these reasons, we expect that a citizen's probability of having an attachment to a political party is higher in election times. Furthermore, for those already identifying with a party, election times are expected to strengthen this attachment.

Hypothesis 1a) The probability that a citizen identifies with a party is higher in election times than in non-election times.

Hypothesis 1b) The strength of party identification increases in election times compared to non-election times.

The functional value of partisanship is thought to differ for certain groups in the electorate because some are more 'in need' for a partisan attachment than others. In general, functionality plays an important role when investigating the link between political sophistication and partisanship. Luskin (1990, p.332) defines political sophistication as "the extent to which [...] political cognitions are numerous, cut a wide substantive swath, and are highly organized or 'constrained"'. While political knowledge is generally considered to be the best single indicator of political sophistication, political interest, levels of education or political activity are also regularly looked at (Lachat, 2007; Dassonneville et al., 2012).

An identification with a political party is assumed to serve as a cognitive shortcut for "organizing political information, evaluations and behaviors" (Dalton, 2007). Consequently, having a party attachment is of most functional value among the low interested and low politically sophisticated (Dalton, 2007, 2013; Shively, 1979). Empirical research, however, has indicated that low sophisticated voters are less likely to have a party identification than the high sophisticated (Albright, 2009; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Marthaler, 2008). It seems, therefore, that the citizens who are least in need of cognitive heuristics when thinking about politics, are most likely to make use of such a shortcut (Lau et al., 2008).

These somewhat contradictory findings can be explained by means of the involvement hypothesis (Ohr et al., 2005, 2009). The reasoning then is that higher political sophistication leads to a higher political involvement, fostering partisan attachments. This argumentation was already brought up scholars indicating that especially more aware (i.e. more knowledgeable) voters develop stable opinions due to their ability to cue consistent information that is according to their predispositions (Taber and Logde, 2006; Zaller, 1992).

Obviously, in election times voters are much more exposed to political information than in times where no elections take place. In election periods "only a remote and indifferent citizen could fail to absorb some few meaningful items of information" (Converse, 1962, p.586). These times are information-rich not only because of higher media coverage (newspaper front pages, TV debates, etc.) but also because of direct contact of parties with their potential voters (letters, information desks, etc.). Furthermore, highly informative periods are not limited to the campaign period only. After the election as well, politicians and political parties tend to dominate the news coverage for a while.

Citizens have been found to be responsive to campaign information (Hillygus and Jackman, 2003; Lodge et al., 1995; Mitchell, 2014). Political information prevalent in election times , however, is not equally processed by all voters. As an example, the effect of information is dependent on prior political values and predispositions (Dilliplane, 2014; Lavine and Gschwend, 2006; Levendusky, 2013; Wagner et al., 2014). Furthermore, differences in voters level of political sophistication as well can be thought to affect how citizens process campaign information. Taber and Logde (2006) demonstrated differences in information processing between low and high politically sophisticated citizens. While the sophisticated seek out for congruent information, the non-politically sophisticated do not show such a prior attitude effect. Likewise, Meffert and Gschwend (2011) have shown that the high politically sophisticated and high knowledgeable tend to discount party signals during election campaigns. Additionally, a number of recent studies have shown that knowledge gaps are reduced in information-rich environments (Fraile, 2013; Iyengar et al., 2010; Jerit et al., 2006; Kuklinski et al., 2001; Wolak, 2008). It is hence safe to assume that especially the low sophisticated and least knowledgeable voters will benefit from the wealth of information available in election times. Following previous research we expect the effect of elections on the activation of partisanship to be heterogeneous. More specifically, we expect the effect of political sophistication on party identification to be moderated by whether or not it is election times. The probability that the low politically sophisticated identify with a party is hypothesized to increase more strongly in election times than does the

probability of the high politically sophisticated. Additionally, we expect the party attachment of the low politically sophisticated to be stronger in election times compared to non-election times. For the high politically sophisticated, by contrast, we do not expect that the strength will substantively vary from election times to non-election times.

> *Hypothesis 2a)* The probability that a low politically sophisticated citizen identifies with a party increases more strongly in election times than does the probability of the high politically sophisticated.
>
> *Hypothesis 2b)* The strength of party identification increases more strongly for low politically sophisticated in election times than does the strength of party identification for high politically sophisticated.

3 Data and Methods

Testing these hypotheses empirically requires using appropriate data. Only panel data allow "to test whether effects of exposure to information flows, are major forces in shaping attitudes" (Zaller, 1992, p.118). Therefore, we made use of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), which given the time it has already been in the field can be considered an exceptional longitudinal data set. Party identification was included from the first wave of the data collection onwards, which makes it possible to trace identification patterns in Germany over 29 years (1984-2012) including seven federal elections. The SOEP applies a complex sampling design including several refreshment waves. In this paper we focus on respondents living in former West German states[1]. In fact, East German states were covered by the SOEP immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall; however people from former East German states and former West German states differ profoundly with regard to political attitudes and behavior. Hence, it is a common procedure to exclude respondents living in former East German states (Arzheimer 2006; Dalton

[1]For the analyses we consider only individuals with a personal questionnaire (netto 10-19). The data collection was carried out in various modes, namely CAPI, PAPI, and CATI (with and without interviewers). We focused on Sample 'A German West', 'E Refreshment 1998', 'H Refreshment 2006', 'J Refreshment 2011', and 'K Refreshment 2012'.

2012; Neundorf, Smets, and Garca-Albacete 2013; Schmitt-Beck, Weick, and Christoph 2006). This leaves as with a sample of N=25,111 respondents and N=210,702 observations respectively. Due to panel attrition and refreshments the panel is unbalanced with a minimum of one observation and maximum of 29 observations. On average respondents have 4 observations.

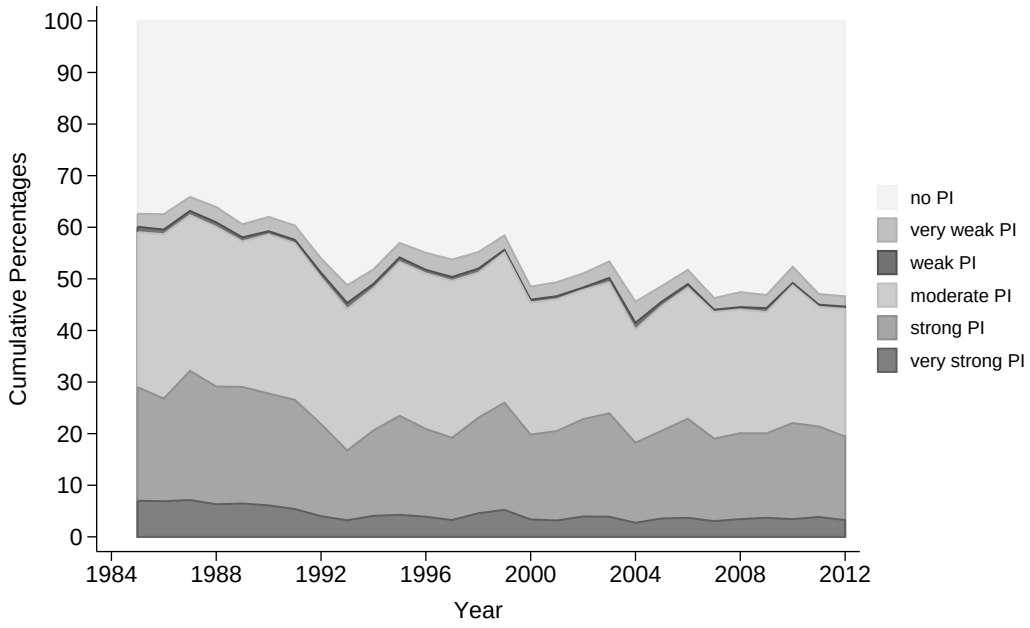
3.1 Operationalization

The dependent variable *party identification*[2] was coded categorical, distinguishing respondents without a party identification (0), those identifying with a party very weakly (1), fairly weakly (2), moderately (3), fairly strongly (4), and very strongly (5)[3]. In Figure 1 we present the over-time evolution of the extent to which respondents identify with a party. The graph illustrates that at on aggregate level there has been an overall decline of partisanship in West-Germany. Interestingly, this decline is not monotonous and one can clearly see a pattern of ups and downs in more or less regular intervals for each of the categories. The occurrence of general elections do not always appear to coincide with the peaks in partisanship, but this can be thought to be a consequence of the timing of data gathering. Fieldwork for the SOEP is usually conducted in the beginning of a year, while elections took place mostly in September the year before. Taking this data-collection issue into account, rises in partisanship do indeed occur in election times. While suggestive, the graph cannot give us information on variation in partisanship at an individual level. To this end, a more complex research design is needed, which is why we make use of longitudinal individual-level analysis.

[2]Party Identification is asked in three steps: 1) "Many people in Germany are inclined to a particular party over time even if they vote for another party now and then. How about you: Are you inclined to a particular party in Germany?" 2) "Which party are you inclined to?" and 3) "How strong are you inclined to this party?"

[3]Respondents answering 'dont know' to the question (3.5% of the observations in the sample), were coded as missing.

Figure 1: Share of PI in the Former West German States from 1985-2012



The main independent variables in our analyses are *election periods* and *political sophistication*. The former is operationalized through the time where elections took place. General elections (which are covered in the SOEP) were held in 25th of January in 1987, 2nd of December in 1990, 16th of October in 1994, 27th of September in 1998, 22nd of September in 2002, 18th of September in 2005, and the 27th of September in 2009[4]. The election time variable spans a period of time from an equal length before and after the election. Information becomes more decisive the closer to the election date and is afterwards forgotten fairly rapidly (Huber, 2013). Thus, the election period covers the relatively short time span from 60 days before the election date to 60 days after the election date[5]. When respondents were interviewed during that period, the variable takes on the value 1 and if the respondent was interviewed in a time without electoral campaigns the variable takes on the value 0. As mentioned above, elections

[4]It has been shown that not only general elections affect attitudes, but that also state elections are decisive for political learning (Huber, 2013). State level elections are not held at the same day but in different years (http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/landtagswahlen/wahltermine/). We controlled for state elections which did not change our results. Also state elections have shown to have a positive effect on partisanship. For the sake of clarity we included only the parsimonious model in the paper. Results are available from the authors upon request.

[5]Other operationalizations of the election period were used as well (90 days before and after), but did not substantively change the results of our analyses.

and data collection do not fall on the same date which makes election periods a rather rare event compared to non-election times (3% of the observations fall into election periods).

As proxy measures for political sophistication, we rely on levels of education and political interest as proxy measures. Education is measured in 1 "less than High school degree", 2 "High school degree", and 3 "more than High school degree"[6]. Political interest is measured in four categories from 1 "non" over 2 "weak" and 3 "strong" to 4 "very strong". By including these two indicators, we capture the two items of which Dalton (2012) claims that they are essential items of 'cognitive mobilization'. By relying on these two indicators, we follow how previous research has operationalized political sophistication (Albright, 2009; Dalton, 2012; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Dassonneville, 2014).

To reduce the confounding effects of other determinants of party identification, we include control variables that have been proven to be influential in previous studies on the topic. Most of the important controls refer to social cleavages which still provide a root for partisan attachments in Germany, namely *frequency of church attendance* and *trade union membership*[7] (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011; Elff, 2009). For church attendance the variable is not included in every wave, thus we calculated the median of all measures (the frequency of church attendance was measured 15 times between 1984 and 2012). Since trade union membership is less often included (9 times) and dichotomous, we generated a dynamic measure of trade union membership. The variable takes on the value 0 if the respondent is no member and 1 if the respondent is a member of a trade union. The variable takes on the same value in subsequent waves until the respondent has changed the membership status, it then takes on the most recent status in subsequent waves. We also control for gender (1=female, 0=male) and the age of the respondent. As the same respondents are followed over time, age and time effects are perfectly collinear. Therefore we additionally include birth cohorts as well. Cohorts have a ten years range, with the value

[6]To help the reader we refer to the German 'Abitur' as High school degree. A lower degree, thus, encompasses 'Hauptschulabschluss' and 'Realschulabschluss'. A higher degree refers to tertiary degrees.

[7]It is indeed true that religious affiliation and trade union membership heightens not only the likelihood to identify with any party but with a particular party (namely either the Christian Democratic Party CDU, or the Social Democratic Party SPD or the Leftist Party Die LINKE). However, since we do not differentiate between identification with a particular party it is safe to include the controls in the model.

label 1 indicating the oldest birth cohort (<1936) and 7 the youngest birth cohort (1986-1995). Finally, to control for the decline of partisanship over time that we observed in Figure 1, survey year dummies were included. Descriptive statistics on the independent variables included in the analyses are listed in the following table.

Table 1: Descriptives

Variable	min	max	mean	sd	N*
Strength of Party ID	0	5	1.83	1.80	159,442
Election Period	0	1	0.03	0.03	159,442
Education	1	3	1.96	1.96	159,442
Political Interest	1	4	2.31	2.31	159,442
Church Attendance	1	4	1.88	1.88	159,442
Union Membership	0	1	0.15	0.15	159,442
Sex (1=female)	0	1	0.53	0.53	159,442
Birth Cohort	1	7	3.20	3.20	159,442
Survey Year	1985	2012	1999	8.10	159,442

Source: SOEP v29; own calculations
*the sample size refers to the observations included in the analysis

3.2 Analytical Approach

Taking into account the longitudinal data structure we applied a mixed effects ordered logistic regression by means of which we model the categorical outcome variable. The log odds of the outcomes are modelled as a linear combination of the predictor variables. Furthermore, the mixed effects approach address the clustered structure of the data , with observations nested in individuals. The probability for a response to occur Pr(Yit = j)[8] on level-1 unit i is then conditional on random effects θ on level-2 (Hedeker and Gibbons, 2006).

$$Pr(y_{it} = j|\theta) = \alpha_i + \beta_1 x_{1i} + ... + \beta_k x_{ki} + \gamma_1 z_{1it} + ... + \gamma_j z_{jit} + u_i \quad (1)$$

α_i denotes the individual-varying intercept (random intercept). x_i denotes the time-constant covariates such as gender, birth cohort, and church attendance. Those are time invariant, which means that they remain the same for each respondent over all waves. In contrast zit denotes the time-varying covariates such as the election period, political interest, and trade union membership. Education is also not constant over all waves. In case a respondent achieved a higher educational degree the change will be indicated in the variable. u_i denotes the fixed unit-specific error term.

In order to test our second hypothesis we include interaction terms into the model. We know, however, that we cannot straightforwardly interpret coefficients of an interaction term from a regression table. Without meaningful post estimation we cannot assess whether effects are significant and substantive (Brambor et al., 2006). We hence calculated predicted probabilities and present relevant findings graphically by simulating and plotting quantities of interest (King et al., 2000).

Predicted probabilities are calculated by the logistic function:

$$Pr(y_{it} = j|\theta) = \frac{exp(\tau_j - xb_k)}{1 + exp(\tau_j - xb_k)} - \frac{exp(\tau_{j-1} - xb_k)}{1 + exp(\tau_{j-1} - xb_k)} \quad (2)$$

[8] Pr(Yit=j) if $\tau_{j-1} \leq Y_i^* \leq \tau_j$ for j=1, ..., J
where τ_l (for l=0,...,J) are the threshold parameters with $\tau_l < \tau_m$ for all l < m and $\tau_0 = -\infty$ and $\tau_J = \infty$
(see http://cran.uvigo.es/web/packages/Zelig/vignettes/ologit.pdf)

Where xb_k denotes the linear predictor for given covariate values (as obtained from equation 1) and given coefficient estimates. Uncertainty is incorporated by random draws from a multivariate normal distribution with coefficient point estimates as mean vector and the estimated variance-covariance matrix as variance. Since the model includes random effects on the 2nd level (θ), the mean random intercept was used in order to calculate predicted probabilities. In effect, the variance of the distribution of the random effect was set to zero which represents probabilities for an average person with given covariate values.

4 Results

Is partisanship strengthened in election times? And if yes, does the effect vary for different levels of political sophistication? Following we discuss our empirical findings against the background of the functional theory of partisanship.

We subsequently test our first hypothesis 1a, which states that the probability that a citizen identifies with a party is higher in election times than in non-election times. The basic model (Model 1 in Table 2) includes only the main effect of election periods on the strength of party identification. In Model 2 the other main effects education and political interest have been included. In both models the coefficients tell us that election periods have a positive effect on party identification.

Calculating predicted probabilities we find a large difference between having a party identification in election times compared to non-election times. When no elections take place the probability for an average citizen to have no identification is 46% (95% CI: 0.45-0.46). In times where there are elections the probability to have no identification decreases to 28% (95% CI: 0.24-0.32). To put it differently, the probability of having a party identification is 72% in election times and 54% when there is no election. Furthermore, the probability for a moderate identification in election times is 50% compared to a probability of 39% outside of election campaigns. We can hence conclude that more citizens identify with a party in election times and that party attachments are strengthened as well in the context of elections.

Table 2: Ordered Logit Random-Effects Regression Models

	Model 0	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Election Period (1=yes)		0.62 ***	0.68 ***	1.16 ***	0.75 ***
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Education low (ref.: mid)			−0.25 ***	−0.26 ***	−0.33 ***
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Education high (ref.: mid)			0.15 ***	0.16 ***	0.23 ***
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Election Period*low Edu				0.05	0.05
				(0.08)	(0.08)
Election Period*high Edu				−0.26 **	−0.22 *
				(0.09)	(0.09)
Political Interest			1.28 ***	1.29 ***	1.29 ***
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Election*Political Interest				−0.19 ***	−0.18 ***
				(0.05)	(0.05)
Church Attendance					0.14 ***
					(0.02)
Trade Union Membership					0.19 ***
					(0.03)
Female (1=yes)					−0.15 ***
					(0.04)
Cohort(ref.:<1936)					
1936-1945					0.04
					(0.07)
1946-1955					−0.32 ***
					(0.07)
1956-1965					−0.63 ***
					(0.06)
1966-1975					−0.94 ***
					(0.07)
1976-1985					−1.20 ***
					(0.08)
1986-1995					−1.42 ***
					(0.11)
Cutpoints					
Cut1	0.02	0.03	2.90 ***	2.91 ***	2.91 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Cut2	0.07 **	0.09 ***	3.00 ***	3.00 ***	3.00 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Cut3	0.28 ***	0.30 ***	3.18 ***	3.20 ***	3.20 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Cut4	2.45 ***	2.47 ***	5.45 ***	5.47 ***	5.51 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Cut5	5.37 ***	5.39 ***	8.52 ***	8.53 ***	8.60 ***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)
N	16.918	16.918	16.918	16.918	16.918
Observations	159.442	159.442	159.442	159.442	159.442
LogLik	−162260.54	−162071.43	−155924.78	−155907.01	−154032.88
σ_2^u	6.41	6.42	4.81	4.81	4.65

Standard errors in parentheses. Time fixed effects are included but not shown in the table.
$^{***}p < .001$;$^{**}p < .01$;$^{*}p < .05$

Our second hypothesis 1b refers to the strength of party identification. We expect that citizens who already have a party identification will identify during election times more strongly with that party. Interestingly, party identification is not steadily strengthened but especially affects the levels 'no identification', 'moderate identification', and 'strong identification'. Meaning that the probability for having a 'very weak' or 'weak' identification, as well as a 'very strong' identification do not differ significantly between election times and non-election times (see table 3). It seems that citizens who do not identify with a party when there are no elections do develop a moderate or strong identification in election times instead of a very weak or weak identification. Also citizens who already identify moderately with a party in non-election times do not develop a very strong, but a strong identification in election times.

Table 3: Predicted Probabilities for Strength of PI dependent on Election Period

	No	Very weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very strong
No Election	0.46	0.01	0.06	0.39	0.08	0.00
Election	0.28	0.01	0.05	0.50	0.15	0.01

Source: SOEP v29; own calculations

As clear from the effects for political interest and education in Model 2, the results furthermore support previous findings about a substantive positive effect of political sophistication on partisanship (Albright, 2009; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Marthaler, 2008). Citizens with less than a High school degree (equivalent to Hauptschule or Realschule) are less likely to identify with a party compared to citizens with a High school degree (equivalent to Abitur); whereas citizens with higher education, i.e. university degree, are more likely to identify with a party compared to people with a High school degree.

As expected, political interest has a strong positive effect on having a party identification. The more someone is interested in politics, the more likely is she or he to possess a party identification. As an illustration of the size of this effect of political interest, Table 4 displays predicted probabilities for varying levels of political interest (all other variables held at their means). Citizens who are not interested in politics have an 82% probability to not identify with

a party whereas citizens who are very strongly interested in politics have only a 9% probability to not identify with a party.

Table 4: Predicted Probabilities for Low and High Levels of Political Interest

	Political Interest			
Strength of PI	Non	Weak	Strong	Very strong
No Pi	**0.82**	**0.55**	**0.25**	**0.09**
	(0.81-0.82)	(0.54-0.56)	(0.25-0.26)	(0.08-0.09)
Very weak PI	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.00**
	(0.01-0.01)	(0.01-0.02)	(0.01-0.01)	(0.00-0.01)
Weak PI	**0.03**	**0.05**	**0.05**	**0.02**
	(0.03-0.03)	(0.05-0.06)	(0.04-0.05)	(0.02-0.02)
Moderate PI	**0.13**	**0.32**	**0.51**	**0.45**
	(0.12-0.12)	(0.31-0.33)	(0.50-0.51)	(0.44-0.46)
Strong PI	**0.02**	**0.05**	**0.17**	**0.41**
	(0.01-0.02)	(0.05-0.06)	(0.16-0.18)	(0.40-0.42)
Very strong PI	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.01**	**0.03**
	(0-0)	(0-0)	(0.01-0.01)	(0.03-0.04)

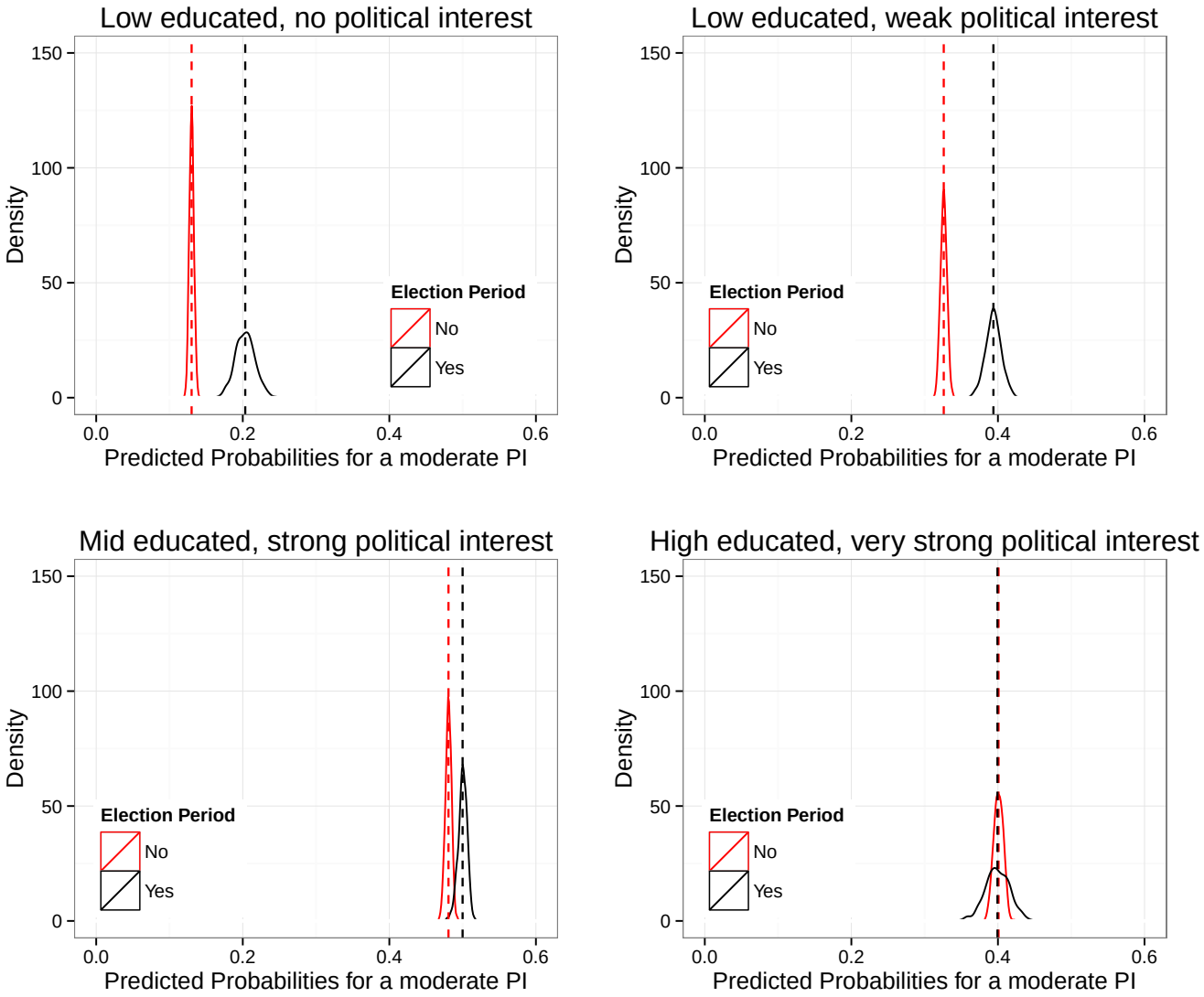
Source: SOEP v29; own calculations
95% confidence intervals in parentheses

In Model 3, then, we test whether the relationship between political sophistication and party identification is moderated by electoral campaigns (hypothesis 2a and 2b). We expect that due to the functional value of partisanship, especially the low sophisticated would benefit from election times. Hence, we expect the interaction to be negative, i.e. mitigating the effect of political sophistication. The interactions between education and election times go in the hypothesized direction but are not significant. For the interaction between political interest and election campaigns we do find a significant negative effect. However, as mentioned above, we cannot prematurely infer anything from tables with regard to interaction effects in a logistic regression. For education and political interest we therefore simulated a meaningful scenario for politically low sophisticated, i.e. low educated and no or weak interest in politics, compared to high sophisticated, i.e. high educated and very strong interested in politics (and a middle category of mid educated with strong interest in politics).

While we find a substantive and significant difference in partisan strength between election times and non-election times for the low sophisticated, we do not find any difference for the high politically sophisticated (see table 5 in the appendix). As before, not all strength levels are affected by election periods. Especially between no identification and a moderate identification we find differences between election times and non-election times, at least for lower levels of political sophistication. Largest differences are found to be between no identification and a moderate identification.

Figure 2 illustrates the effect for the probability of having a moderate party identification in election times compared to non-election times. When there are no elections low educated with no interest have a 13% probability to identify moderately with a party. During election periods the probability is higher, namely at 20%. For low educated with weak political interest we also find a 7 percentage point higher probability to identify with a party in election times (32%) compared to no elections times (39%). For the high politically sophisticated, however, the probability for identifying moderately with a party is the same for election times and non-election times, in fact 40%. Indeed, the high sophisticated are in general more likely to identify with a party - especially to identify with a party strongly - however in election times an identification is neither more likely nor strengthened (see table 5 in the appendix). One could assume that high sophisticated that strongly identify with a party when no elections take place might identify very strongly with a party in election times. That is not the case though.

Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities for a moderate PI dependent on Election Period



Our results indicate that while low sophisticated voters are *more likely* to possess a party identification in election times than when no elections take place. The high politically sophisticated voters by contrast are *not more likely* to possess a party identification in election times than in times where no elections take place. In terms of the functional value of partisanship as proposed in the theory we can assume that citizens who are especially in need for cognitive heuristics will develop a higher level of identification in relevant context, i.e. election periods. The gap in partisanship between low and high sophisticated is, indeed, smaller in election times.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Given the continued relevance of party identification in helping voters to process political information and in making electoral decisions, both a decrease of partisanship over time and a knowledge gap in who identifies with a party and who does not can be reason for concern. In this paper we argue, however, that election campaigns render partisanship of higher functional value. As a consequence, the general decline of partisanship is expected and found to be counterbalanced in election times; when partisanship is of most functional value, voters are also more likely to report identifying with a particular political party and existing partisan attachments are strengthened.

Additionally, and more importantly, we find the sophistication gap in partisanship to be narrowed in election times. The reason therefore is that the increase in partisanship in election times is situated mostly among the lower sophisticated. As a result, when the need for partisanship is highest, those who would benefit most from identifying with a party do indeed develop a partisan attachment or identify with a party more strongly.

These results provide nuance to negative accounts on the evolution of partisanship over the last decades. First, the decrease in party attachments over time is compensated somewhat in election times, although the overall trend is still one of decline. Second, the regularly reported gap in partisanship between low and high politically sophisticated citizens as well is narrowed in election times. Election campaigns appear to play an important role exceeding the function of merely providing citizens with information on political parties and politicians. Campaigns more essentially provide the electorate with what is needed for developing partisanship.

Our study obviously suffers from a number of limitations as well. First, the analysis is limited to the German context only. Even though previous research has illustrated that Germany is a relevant case for investigating partisanship, future research should clarify whether the patterns observed can be generalized. Second, even though we make use of an exceptionally long dataset covering 29 years, the number of observations in election times is still limited. Third, our anal-

ysis is only a start. We showed that citizens partisanship changes over time and that increases coincide with the timing of elections. The assumption is that the information-rich context which election times result in, render partisanship and strong party attachments highly valuable. More research is needed, however, to disentangle the causal mechanisms that strengthen the development of partisanship in election times. Is all information equally important for the activation of partisanship or do only specific types of information contribute to this development?

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Table 5: Predicted Probabilities for Strength of PI for Sophistication Levels dependent on Election Period

	Low education no interst		Low education weak interest		Mid education strong interest		High education very strong interest	
Strength of PI	No Election	Election	No Election	Election	No Election	Election	No Election	Election
No Pi	**0.82**	**0.71**	**0.55**	**0.45**	**0.32**	**0.28**	**0.07**	**0.07**
	(0.81-0.82)	(0.67-0.75)	(0.54-0.56)	(0.42-0.48)	(0.30-0.33)	(0.25-0.30)	(0.06-0.07)	(0.05-0.08)
Very weak PI	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0**	**0**
	(0.01-0.01)	(0.01-0.01)	(0.01-0.02)	(0.01-0.02)	(0.01-0.01)	(0.01-0.01)	(0-0)	(0-0)
Weak PI	**0.03**	**0.04**	**0.05**	**0.06**	**0.05**	**0.05**	**0.02**	**0.02**
	(0.03-0.03)	(0.04-0.05)	(0.05-0.06)	(0.05-0.06)	(0.05-0.05)	(0.05-0.05)	(0.02-0.02)	(0.01-0.02)
Moderate PI	**0.13**	**0.20**	**0.32**	**0.39**	**0.48**	**0.50**	**0.40**	**0.40**
	(0.12-0.14)	(0.18-0.23)	(0.32-0.33)	(0.37-0.42)	(0.47-0.49)	(0.49-0.51)	(0.39-0.41)	(0.37-0.43)
Strong PI	**0.02**	**0.03**	**0.05**	**0.08**	**0.13**	**0.16**	**0.47**	**0.47**
	(0.02-0.02)	(0.02-0.03)	(0.05-0.06)	(0.07-0.09)	(0.12-0.14)	(0.14-0.17)	(0.45-0.48)	(0.43-0.51)
Very strong PI	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.05**	**0.05**
	(0-0)	(0-0)	(0-0)	(0-0)	(0.01-0.01)	(0.01-0.01)	(0.04-0.05)	(0.04-0.06)

Source: SOEP v29; own calculations
95% confidence intervals in parentheses